

The Senate created Bobby Baker, and now this unwieldy body of men must share responsibility for what he did.

Bobby was the boy to see

BY BEN H. BAGDIKIAN AND DON OBERDORFER



Many broke when Bobby Baker, a young man and Baker, charged Bobby had accepted profits, that double payment to...

I put the cash into a white envelope. He always wanted cash, no checks. At first it was \$250 a month—two hundred's and a fifty. I'd lick the flap, put the envelope in my pocket, drive up to the Capitol and go into his office. We'd be alone, just him and me. He'd take the envelope, tear it all the end, pull out the money and count it. Once, when the price went up to \$650 a month and we didn't have a chance to go to the bank, we had to use money from company receipts in the office. So I took this great big wad of bills into his office at the Capitol, and he counted it all out. It was \$650, all in twenties, tens and fives laid out on his desk. He always counted it out right then and there."

The speaker is Ralph Hill, an aggressive, 35-year-old Washington businessman from a small town in South Carolina. "Hill" is Bobby Gene Baker, another aggressive, 35-year-old Washington businessman from another small town in South Carolina. Hill made his accusations in a civil lawsuit filed September 9. Until he made these charges—which Baker has categorically denied—Bobby was also secretary for the Democratic majority of the United States Senate. He was known—to those who knew him at all—as the quiet, efficient "perfect servant" of the Senate.

When the long, electric signal rang through the marble mazes of the Capitol, bringing senators rushing to the chamber for a vote, Bobby Baker was always at the rear of the august hall, a slightly stooped young man, almost six feet tall, dressed in an impeccable dark suit with a vest and a white silk tie. As each Democratic senator hustled through the swinging door, he would whisper briefly with Baker. Page boys would rush to him with scribbled telephone messages, and Bobby, still talking, would scan the messages and stuff them into pockets already full of paper. He would whisk down the aisle

and talk briefly with one senator, hurry over in response to a knock of the head from another. He snipped his fingers, and a page boy sprang to his side. A few words and the page would evaporate on some silent errand.

Quietly, efficiently, flawlessly, Bobby organized the vote, shepherding the majority of what senators modestly tell themselves is "the greatest deliberative body in the world." He was informing each senator what the vote was for, what the leadership would like and what the final count was likely to be. At any given moment he knew where every senator was and what he was doing. He would tell them when they should be present and when they could leave, when it was wise to speak and when to keep quiet. And he was seldom wrong.

Bobby was a gracious impresario, moving like a polite nephew among so many busy uncles. He regularly informed one senator when he could safely take an hour off for his daily visit to the Senate gymnasium. During the round-the-clock civil-rights filibuster of 1958, he told elderly Democratic liberals when they could go home to sleep—and then dispatched police cruisers to pick them up when they were needed on the floor. Once Bobby chafed Sen. Mike Mansfield of Oklahoma by telephone for three days, while the senator was flying through Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel, trying to summon him back for an unexpected farm-bill vote important to Mansfield's future.

No law or regulation describes Bobby's job, but he was the most effective helper the Senate ever had. He knew on almost every issue which way the Senate would go and how each senator would vote and why he would vote that way. The Senate found him almost indispensable.

Then Ralph Hill sued Bobby and some of his friends. He charged that the Senate majority secretary had used his influence to get Hill's vending machines into a defense plant and then, after taking cash payoffs, conspired to cancel the vending contract. Bobby denied all of Hill's charges. Nevertheless, all kinds of rumors began to spread through Washington. Stories of strange goings-on appeared in the press. The FBI entered the case.

At first the Senate remained officially unconcerned. Bobby's boss, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, said his aide's outside business was no affair of the Senate. But one senator disagreed: Dogged John Williams of Delaware stirred from his chair in the chamber and pursued his own quiet investigation downtown. Bobby avoided him as long as possible and finally resigned rather than face his questions.

As the scandal grew, some people began talking of it as an American "Pro-

fumo case," for Bobby Baker's world included a number of pretty girls who were not interested solely in politics. The most spectacular was Ellen Rometsch, a brunet model married to a sergeant in the German embassy. After an FBI investigation both the Rometschs were mysteriously whisked back to Germany.

Reporters looking into rumors of wild parties invaded the Quorum Club, a disappointingly tame establishment which Bobby had helped organize as a Capitol Hill meeting place for lawmakers and lobbyists. They trooped to the Carousel, a million-dollar luxury hotel in Ocean City, Md., that Bobby had built as a "high-style hideaway for the advise-and-consent set." In addition, they discovered that Bobby, his wife and five children were living in a new \$124,500 mansion, complete with a Chinese houseboy to answer the door. Bobby also owned a \$28,000 town house occupied by his 23-year-old administrative assistant, a former beauty queen named Carole Tyler.

And along with this high life, reporters uncovered the first traces of an incredible financial empire. Bobby turned out to be an insider on a spectacular stock deal of the Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation. He had close ties to Serv-U Corporation, which had a \$3.5 million vending business in defense plants. Newsman reported his interests in a private law practice, an insurance firm, a travel agency, real estate—even a cemetery.

Bobby Baker's official salary was \$19,600 yearly. By his own estimate his assets were over \$1.5 million. The Senate decided it had better investigate.

The legislators' initial reluctance was understandable. Bobby knows and the senators know that whatever he did has also been done by some of the men he served. Senators for years have laid down rigid rules for others in government, but they have refused to apply similar rules to themselves. To a remarkable degree, the senators would be sitting in judgment on the values Bobby Baker had learned from them.

Bobby, more than any other human being, was the child of the United States Senate. He was delivered into that body while he was still in knee pants. From the start of his rise at the age of 14 to the moment of his fall at age 35, he was never off the Senate payroll.

In 1942 a senator from South Carolina, on the recommendation of friends, chose young Bobby to be a Senate page boy. Cold and homesick, he arrived by bus from his hometown of Pickens, S. C., with \$60 in his wallet. When he showed up for work at the Capitol, the older boys took him into the gloomy caverns of the cellar and stripped off his brand-new page-boy knickerbockers to administer the usual broomstick hazing. To their de-

light, the country kid was wearing old-fashioned long woolen underwear. They whopped him extra hard, until he could not sit down; they squinted him with Selzer water and reduced him to bitter sob. That night in his lonely room he wrote in his diary, "I'm so homesick." For 10 nights he made the identical entry. Back home, Miss Lucille Hallin, one of his schoolteachers, heard of his sorrow and wrote and told him to persevere. She got back a note penciled on lined paper: "Miss Hallin, Bobby Baker don't quit."

Bobby did not quit; instead, he made the Senate his home. In the years that followed Bobby experienced the major episodes of a young man's life under the great dome of the Capitol building itself. There he grew into long pants, had his first shave, went to high school, received his diploma, studied his college and law-school lessons, launched his first business venture, met his wife and courted her. His wedding reception in 1948 was held in the Capitol chambers that are today the offices of a man central to his life, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson. Other boys have aunts and uncles beaming at their receptions. Bobby had five United States senators.

He was friendly, energetic, quick to learn. At the age of 16 he was chief Democratic page boy. At 19 he to impressed his superiors that the patronage committee created a job for him, that of chief of the Democratic cloakroom. His work in this Senate business chamber brought him in close contact with every senator. He learned quickly to hitch his wagon to the Senate's rising stars, particularly a newcomer named Lyndon Johnson. When the job of Senate Democratic whip came open, Bobby discouraged Johnson's opponents by leaking news stories that Lyndon already had it sewed up. Johnson won.

In 1951, when Bobby was 24 years old, Johnson helped him become assistant to the secretary of the Democratic minority. Two years after that the Democrats regained control of the Senate. Johnson became majority leader and Bobby Baker was elected secretary for the majority. The Constitution says a man may not become a senator until he is 30 years old; at the age of 26 Bobby was advising senators what to do.

The country boy showed an early sensitivity to status. In 1947 Bobby borrowed \$600 from a fellow Senate employee to start his first business venture. He bought a new car, repainted it as a taxicab and became one of Washington's many part-time cab drivers. Shortly after that he began courting pretty Dorothy Comstock, who was secretary to one of his bosses, Senate Democratic whip Scott Lucas. He hastily went out of the hack business

Photographs by Ollie



As much as any man, the genial, efficient Bobby Baker ran the Senate machinery; until scandal broke, most senators considered him indispensable

painting his car back to respectable passenger colors. A little later he had plastic surgery to reduce the prominence of his nose which, apparently, he regarded as unsuitable for a man of growing authority. Then he took yet another step. Bobby Gene Baker was named by his father after the golfer Bobby Jones and the prizefighter Gene Tunney. But now he began to list himself in official directories as "Robert G. Baker." His birth certificate in Pickens County Courthouse bears the original typewritten name, "Bobby Gene Baker." At a date unknown, the name "Robert" was added in ink.

Bobby, as he continued to be known throughout political Washington, was at the threshold of important power. But before one can understand the significance of this power, it is necessary to understand something about the personal problems of a United States senator. He

has three urgent pressures: the need for help in voting, the desire for some relief from the demands of the work, and the necessity for money to run for reelection.

A senator must vote on more measures each year than any single human being can possibly understand. Last year the Senate acted on 1,212 bills, some of which had as many as 50 amendments. An elaborate system of committees keeps track of this flood of measures, but when the senator reaches the chamber for a vote, he must find out quickly and accurately what each bill is about and how it affects him. He needs to know when he can safely mist part of the endless debate, when he can prudently return to his state for political fence-mending or escape for dinner with his family. All the while his thoughts drift ahead to the next election, in which virtue may have its place but there is no substitute for campaign funds.

Fate could not have designed a better answer to these problems than Bobby Gene Baker. This impressed many of his bosses even before they reached the Senate. In his additional duty as part-time secretary of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee—the financial and electioneering arm of Senate Democrats—Bobby was often on the road bearing advice and money. For many a new candidate he was like a benevolent angel, their first harbinger of the Promised Land.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which Bobby served from 1956 to 1961, gets its funds from patriotic citizens, from the party faithful and from special interests with axes to grind. Despite campaign finance laws, there is a lot more political spending than anyone reports. Even so, the committee reported receipts of \$952,000 during Bobby's five-year tenure. The committee of senators,

headed by George Smathers of Florida, decided how the funds would be dispensed. And while Bobby did not determine who got what, he kept financial records in his office, only a few feet from the Senate chamber. This gave him invaluable knowledge of extraordinary value in politics: who gave money and who got it.

In 1961 a new set of Democratic leaders decided it was imprudent to make lav and collect cash in the same place. They moved the countinghouse downtown. The inconvenience of the new location ended Bobby's campaign-committee role but it did not end his access to political funds. Last January on the Senate floor he approached a newly elected senator, Tom McIntyre of New Hampshire, and said "some people" he knew would be willing to pick up McIntyre's unpaid campaign bills of more than \$10,000. McIntyre declined the offer.

On a salary of \$19,600 he admitted

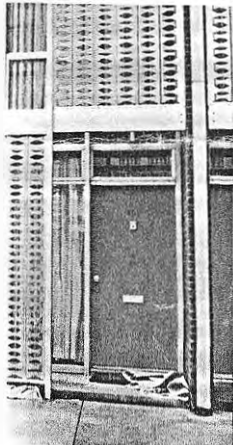


Bobby, his wife and five children recently moved into this \$124,500 suburban mansion.



In happier days, Bobby and milk-maid wife, Dorothy, celebrate at friend's wedding.

Baker's administrative assistant, Carole Tyler (right), stood in \$28,000 town house which Baker owns; uncollected newspapers in doorway indicate she was not at home.



Once elected, virtually the first act of a senator-to-be was to pay a call on Bobby Baker. He was the perfect adviser on where to find a place to live, which of the senatorial elders to cultivate and which committee assignments to try for. A farm-state senator told to Bobby with the intention of getting on the Agriculture Committee. "Don't do it," Bobby told him. "That's for people from safe states. You can't solve the farm problem, and you'll only get hurt at home." This was shrewd advice; the senator was grateful.

For the committees of the Senate, Bobby was like a marriage broker. He knew who was unhappy with what he had, who coveted another's position, who was bored, who was happy. When committee assignments were shuffled, he could play many moves ahead like a computer or master chess player.

Until the very end almost all the senators were fond of Bobby. But a great many of their assistants were not. One reason is that Bobby began to deal directly with senators, bypassing their aides. "Any time I called Bobby I got him," one senator said. "But my administrative assistant could never reach him unless I was out of town. How would Bobby know I was out of town? I guess I would have called him to see if I could go in the first place."

Anyone studying the evolution of Bobby Baker would find three major influences: Sen. George A. Smathers, the late Sen. Robert S. Kerr; and Vice President Johnson. The fast-climbing Smathers taught Bobby how to dress; the rich and powerful Kerr taught him how to succeed in business; Johnson taught him persuasion, politics and power. The most important, by far, was Johnson.

Bobby's soft South Carolina drawl hardened into an exact copy of Johnson's parched Texas twang, until on the telephone it was almost impossible to distinguish between them. Johnson has no sons, and some people began to call Bobby "Little Lyndon."

Lyndon Johnson not only helped shape Baker; he also transformed the institution they both served. Johnson's skill at fence-mending, logrolling and coalition-building changed the Senate from a loose collection of independent barons to something approaching an organization. No one was more deft at knowing when to grant a favor and when to demand one in return. On a close vote Lyndon Johnson could make favorable senators crystallize out of thin air and cause opponents to dissolve, unheard and uncounted, into the cloakroom. He was a sorcerer and Bobby Baker was his apprentice.

Sometime between January 3, 1955, when Bobby became secretary for the majority, and September 9, 1963, when the Hill lawsuit started him tumbling down, his friends noticed that something was happening to Bobby Baker. Some of his oldest companions think, at least in retrospect, that this change began at the exact moment when it dawned upon Lyndon Johnson that he might become President of the United States.

In the hurly-burly of a national campaign, the former page boy was meeting such people as the Murchisons of Texas; he later took one member of that oil-rich

family to see Gov. Pat Brown of California about a racetrack franchise. Bobby became a close friend of Fred Black Jr., a Washington representative of a large defense contractor, who is now under indictment for income-tax evasion. He came to know big-time gamblers from Las Vegas, some of whom he accompanied to New York headquarters of Pan American World Airways in their pursuit of casino privileges at a Caribbean resort.

But Johnson's campaign collapsed, and he was raised to the lofty irrelevance of the Vice Presidency. He left behind an apprentice who knew the techniques but now served a quite different majority leader. Sen. Mike Mansfield, unlike Johnson, believed senators should make up their own minds. Johnson used to superintend Bobby's every move. Until the scandal broke, the quiet, professional Mansfield did not even know that for eight years Bobby had been available to private clients through his personal law practice downtown.

The fact that there was a "new" Bobby Baker became more evident.

"I was dictating to my secretary in an anteroom just thirty feet from Bobby when they called a vote Bobby knew I was interested in," a senator said of an incident this year. "Bobby seemed to have his mind on something else, and he never notified me. I missed the vote and I blew up at him. 'That never happened before,' I told him. 'I'm not going to depend on you anymore.'"

"I had a definite date to meet Bobby at his office at ten o'clock, and he didn't show up until eleven-thirty," a Senate aide said. "It was so unusual, we talked about it at the time."

Still another recalled that Bobby used to slap him on the back in good-natured camaraderie. "But in the last year or two when I passed him in the cloakroom, he didn't even nod."

Something also seemed to be happening on the Senate floor. There were some important votes which the leadership thought it was going to win but which it lost by one or two votes. In last year's battle over medical care for the aged, Sen. Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, chief Administration strategist for the bill, issued a strange warning against the man paid to help his party: Don't tell Bobby anything. Anderson was suspicious of Bobby's personal allegiance to Senator Kerr, then the leader of the opposition to Medicare. Medicare was brought to a vote after Bobby informed the White House that Kerr would lose by one or two votes. The result stunned Congress: Kerr won by two votes. Some Democrats thought they had been betrayed.

Whatever happened, a part of Bobby's mind was clearly on other things. Stocks, for example. Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation, a Milwaukee company which insures home loans, had been trying for some time to get a favorable tax ruling from the Government. Two weeks before the Government handed down the ruling, Bobby acquired some of the stock. Immediately after the ruling, the stock began to soar. Some time later he wrote an intriguing letter, which he dictated to Carole Tyler. It was typed on his official Senate stationery. "Dear Al,"

assets of \$1,528,436.

it said. "This letter is to acknowledge receipt of \$27,446.93, which is my one half of the receipts from the sale of 3,000 shares of Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation stock which you purchased for yourself and myself March 7, 1950. As you know, we received a total of \$66,889.86 from the sale . . . This stock cost us \$4,905.00 each."

The letter was addressed to Alfred S. Novak, a business partner of Bobby's who was involved not only in stock deals but also in the Maryland motel which was later sold for \$1.2 million.

Novak was found dead in March, 1962, under circumstances which are still a subject of controversy. He was discovered unconscious in his garage, with the car motor running. His death was attributed to a heart attack; two months later the death certificate was amended to list suicide as a cause of death.

In 1958 Bobby had amused his colleagues around the Senate with a minor measure allowing the importation of giraffes from Kenya to a private zoo in Florida. The zookeeper was a client of Bobby's law associate, Ernest C. Tucker, and the giraffe legislation was known jokingly as "Bobby's bill." But in November *The New York Times* reported Baker's part in another measure which was no laughing matter. The paper said he "used his influence" to amend the omnibus tax bill of 1962 in a way which could benefit luxury motels such as the one he owned in Maryland.

By this time it was obvious that Bobby Baker had come a long way from Pickens, S.C. In 1956 he told an interviewer he had an outside income of \$15,000 a year, mainly from South Carolina investments. By the summer of 1962 he told the FHA that his assets were \$1,528,436 and his net worth \$826,286.95.

For the first time Bobby began to talk about retiring—perhaps to seek political office on his own in his native South Carolina. But Ralph Hill and his vending-company lawsuit changed everything.

It is typical of the Senate that the official investigation was assigned to placid, likable Everett Jordan of North Carolina, who was the business partner of some of Bobby's partners in a Howard Johnson motel. Jordan first came to the Senate in 1958. His chronological age is 67. But the Senate, like the Christians, Jews, Moslems and Chinese, has its own system of counting time, and the Year One is always the date of a man's entry into its sacred precincts. By this time scale Bobby is an elder. He came in 21 years ago, and only six members of the present Senate were there before him. For the other 94, the kid from Pickens, like the ceramic spittoons and the antique inkwells, was accepted as part of the tradition. And, because he was so much a child of the Senate, when Bobby fell, some of the Senate's prestige fell with him.

At the end of Everett Jordan's first day in the Senate, at dusk of May 6, 1958, a reporter stopped him in a corridor and inquired what great things had transpired in those first auspicious hours.

"Oh, I went over to the Senate chamber," the kindly old man replied, "and I stayed there until Bobby Baker told me I could come home."

THE END



When Johnson was Senate majority leader and Bobby was his secretary, the two men conferred regularly in Senate halls. But would tell senators what leadership wanted, then report back on how each man was going to vote. Some called Bobby "Little Legend."